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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 206th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 25 May 1994, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. CISSE (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

1. The CHAIRMAN said that in the previous few weeks important political developments had taken place between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). On 29 April 1994, a Protocol on Economic Relations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization concerning future relations with the Palestinian Authority had been signed in Paris. On 2 May 1994, a Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Temporary International Presence in Hebron had been agreed on by Israel and the PLO at Copenhagen. Pursuant to that Memorandum, the first contingent of observers had been deployed in early May.

2. On 4 May 1994, at Cairo, Israel and the PLO had signed an important Agreement for the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area and for the transfer of authority to the PLO. Subsequently, Israeli troops had withdrawn from the areas indicated in the Agreement, which they had occupied for 27 years, and had turned over authority to Palestinian representatives.

3. While those important developments gave renewed cause for hope for the future, the situation in the occupied territories remained tense and continuing violence had resulted in loss of life on both sides. The Committee hoped to see an end to the violence and the continuation of bilateral negotiations between Israel and the PLO aimed at fully implementing the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and it would therefore continue to monitor the situation.

4. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) said that a number of important developments had recently taken place with regard to the occupied territories. On 4 May, Israel and the PLO, with the participation of the United States and the Russian Federation as co-sponsors of the Peace Conference on the Middle East, and of Egypt as the host country, had signed an agreement for Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. That agreement was the first to be implemented under the Declaration of Principles.

5. Implementation by both parties had proceeded reasonably well. After 27 years of continuous occupation, Israel had withdrawn from important areas of Palestinian territory where Palestinian policemen had assumed policing responsibilities. An agreement concerning the temporary presence of international monitors in Hebron had also been implemented.

6. Those developments augured well for the future. Currently, the main task was for the two parties to resume negotiations aimed at implementing the second part of the Declaration of Principles and extending self-rule to the rest of the West Bank.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Observer, Palestine)

7. Unfortunately, a number of threats to the peace process still remained, including the actions of Israeli settlers in Palestinian territories and the measures adopted by Israel to deny access to Jerusalem. Although it had been agreed that negotiations on the status of Jerusalem should take place during the second stage of implementation of the Declaration of Principles, Jerusalem, an important Muslim cultural and religious centre, must remain open to Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. The closure of the Gaza Strip even to the local Palestinian population was another measure by Israel which was not helpful to the peace process. The international community must therefore continue to press for the full implementation of the Declaration of Principles by the two parties in a spirit of goodwill. It must also provide material support for early reconstruction in the Palestinian territories. He wished to thank donor countries and international organizations, in particular the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), for their pledges of assistance.

8. The Palestinian people had taken their first step towards the building of an independent Palestinian State and the exercise of their legitimate rights, which had long received the support of the international community, the United Nations and the Committee. Currently, continued support was more necessary than ever. In that connection, the appointment by the Secretary-General of a Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories to coordinate the programmes of the various United Nations agencies operating there was a significant and welcome development. The recent agreement between the PLO and UNDP concerning the latter's work in the occupied territories was another important development and marked the first time that an agreement of that nature had been signed by the PLO and a United Nations agency.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE CONFERENCE ON "PROSPECTS FOR AN ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE", HELD FROM 3 TO 7 MAY 1994, IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

9. The CHAIRMAN, reporting on the Conference on "Prospects for an Arab-Israeli Peace", held from 3 to 7 May 1994, in the United Kingdom, said that the Conference had been attended by 60 participants representing 20 nationalities and a wide cross-section of opinions. Representatives of Israel had included the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom and the Consul-General of Israel in New York, while the PLO representatives had included the special adviser to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO. The Conference had discussed, inter alia, the political, economic, security, and cooperation aspects of the situation in the Middle East.

10. Commenting on the peace process, a participant from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom had noted that the process had greatly benefited from the cooperation between the United States and the Russian Federation. The PLO had accepted the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area as a minimum on which to build; that minimum would probably not be called in question by any party, and it was unlikely that, with the prospect of gaining power at some future stage, Hamas would challenge it. Peace between Israel and Syria was also possible, since Israel was ready to make concessions on the Golan. The same was true with regard to the situation in Lebanon. As for the Palestinian track, the outlook for the new Palestinian administration

(The Chairman)

was generally favourable. Note had been taken of the stated willingness of the Israeli President to dismantle some Israeli settlements, including settlements on the Golan, while the problem of Israelis living in Jerusalem would be examined at a later stage. Although the United Kingdom had played a relatively minor role in the bilateral negotiations, it had always sought to bring the two parties together and to encourage trade rather than aid in the region. It intended to provide assistance to the autonomous Palestinian territory for the establishment of an administration which could take over some of the programmes for which UNRWA was currently responsible. The Bank of England was also ready to provide support for the development of trade in ways consistent with the Protocol on Economic Relations which had been signed by the two parties on 29 April 1994.

11. Reviewing the progress of multilateral negotiations, a participant from the London University of Reading had said that multilateral negotiations were not simply one negotiating track within the general framework of bilateral negotiations, although the latter received more publicity and were better understood by the public. Multilateral negotiations were designed to act as a catalyst and a confidence-building mechanism for Arabs and Israelis. The multilateral meetings examined such important technical issues as water resources, refugees, arms control, regional security, the environment and regional economic development. Those negotiations, which were less subject to the pressures of public opinion, had already laid the bases for future regional cooperation for economic development and had enabled the bilateral negotiations to take place in a climate of greater trust.

12. Some participants had noted that the Palestinians, whose priority goal was to establish an independent State, had not been very active in all of the multilateral negotiations. It had also been felt that the working group on refugees should consider Palestinian refugees throughout the world and not only those in the Middle East. Lastly, it had been generally agreed that the negotiations had struck an important psychological blow against the barriers which existed between Arabs and Palestinians.

13. Examining ways in which principles could be transformed into realities, the Ambassador of Israel to London had said that the Agreement between Israel and the PLO was an important step towards the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Numerous but unsuccessful attempts had been made to interrupt the peace process and the bilateral negotiations had been long and difficult. Although the situation was currently somewhat clearer, the peace process with Syria would be a long one. On the other hand, the conflict with Jordan was of a more limited nature. In Lebanon, Israel had no territorial ambitions and was concerned only with its security. In that connection, a favourable outcome of the negotiations with Syria should have a positive effect. The Israeli Ambassador had also expressed the belief that, given the relaxation of tensions between Israel and the Arab countries, the Arab boycott should be lifted.

14. In the ensuing discussion, a number of participants expressed the view that the benefits from the peace process were not yet substantial enough to justify a lifting of the boycott. Participants had also acknowledged that the Palestinian administration's authority would be strengthened as the people realized the

(The Chairman)

advantages of autonomy and that the decision under the Declaration of Principles to consider the emotionally charged issue of Jerusalem much later was a sound one.

15. The issue of regional economic development had been introduced by an assistant to the Governor of the Central Bank of Jordan, who had noted that investment was the key to economic development. The region's economic development would also benefit greatly from the introduction of structural adjustment measures, a reduction in military expenditures, a substantial expansion in intraregional trade, an increase in the net inflow of fresh capital and regional cooperation in the form of integrated regional projects. Development was an efficient means of reducing population growth and sound economic reform coupled with reliable external partners could contribute to promoting peace in the region.

16. In the ensuing discussions, participants had noted that countries of the Middle East had complementary economic potential which could be harnessed through cooperation and that durable peace could spark rapid development.

17. Examining the role that international organizations could play by investing in peace, a World Bank representative had stressed the need for donor countries to translate their declarations of intent into tangible contributions. As many projects, including the Emergency Assistance Programme, had not been implemented because of the financing problem, Palestinian leaders should try to avoid the bilateral approach and cooperate instead with the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations present in the region.

18. In the ensuing discussion, participants had pointed out the urgent need to take into account the expected increase in the populations of the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. They had also noted the absolute need for bilateral assistance.

19. The Director of the Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding had introduced the topic of Europe's role in the promotion of peace. He had expressed the view that while Europe's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict was somewhat ambiguous, it should not try to impose its solution on the Arabs but should rather provide them with the economic, training, investment and trade assistance they required.

20. Introducing the topic of the peace process and Israel's security, the Director of the Resa Center for Strategic Studies of Bar-Ilan University of Tel Aviv had suggested that as Arab-Israeli relations were often marked by the use of force and popular support for radicalism, the achievements of the peace process might not be irreversible. Since Israel's primary concern was for its own security, it should therefore not withdraw from the territory along the banks of the Jordan River and from the Golan Heights. While Israel could project an image of peace, it should not abandon its nuclear option, since some countries in the region had their own nuclear option. Although Israel should continue to negotiate, it should do so with appropriate caution.

(The Chairman)

21. Commenting on the same topic, the Consul-General of Israel in New York had said that security should include economic security and that the time element was vital in order to establish lasting peace. The Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area could work despite the risks of terrorist attacks. The Middle East was a highly volatile region where the solution to problems must be envisaged on a step-by-step basis.

22. In the ensuing discussion, most participants had agreed that a political rather than a military solution had a greater chance of prevailing. The idea of strategic settlements had come under heavy criticism as it was felt that civilian settlers would not win a war. Some had felt that the arms race was a waste of money, as very few countries in the region would be able to stop external aggression.

23. Speaking on the institutional framework for autonomy, elections and the Palestinian Council, the Special Adviser to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO had noted that the recently established Palestinian Authority comprised 24 members, 12 from the occupied territories and 12 from abroad. The recently created electoral system should be used to organize the elections scheduled to be held nine months after the transfer of power. Concerning economic issues, a Reconstruction and Development Commission had been established under the guidance of a 14-member Board of Governors. The Palestinian leaders were committed to respecting human rights.

24. In the ensuing discussion, it had been noted that although the Palestinians living in Jerusalem could vote they could not be elected and that the elected members of the Palestinian Authority would negotiate the Final Agreement. The Israeli settlers who remained in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area after the Israeli withdrawal could either leave the territories, request Palestinian citizenship or remain as foreigners.

25. The Israeli viewpoint on internal and external reactions to the agreements had been presented by a professor of the University of Haifa, who had noted that public opinion in Israel was evolving faster than political parties and the Government. Some indicators shed considerable light on the political psychology of Israelis; 85 per cent of the population had admitted that it had fears. The public at large seemed to be against the consideration of the issue of Jerusalem, while nearly half of the population was against the restoration of the Golan Heights to Syria.

26. Speaking on the same issue from a Palestinian perspective, a research associate of the Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, in London, had noted that the crux of the issue was that while Palestinians wanted a State the Israelis were not willing to entertain such a notion. However, there were contradictions within both camps.

27. In the ensuing discussion, participants noted that the reasons for the establishment of Israeli settlements were biblical, ideological and practical and that political compromise was necessary for the peace process to continue.

(The Chairman)

28. The discussions on the creation of a Palestinian State had been introduced by two speakers, one from the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the other from King's College, University of London. The first speaker had envisaged three scenarios: an independent Palestinian State, politically confederated with Jordan and having economic ties with Israel; a politically independent State confederated with Israel with economic ties to Jordan; and an independent and sovereign State without any confederal ties with either Israel or Jordan. According to the second speaker, a point of no-return having been reached, the creation of a Palestinian State was inevitable.

29. Participants had expressed the fear that the establishment of a Greater Jordan or Greater Palestine might foster the idea of a greater Syria and that changes in the Israeli Government might have an adverse impact on the peace process. It had also been noted that the PLO would be responsible for the Palestinian diplomatic missions throughout the world and for conducting the international relations of the new Palestinian Authority. While the offices opened in Jericho by foreign countries would not be considered as diplomatic missions, the Palestinian Authority would nevertheless be able to sign economic and cultural agreements and negotiate arrangements with donor countries.

30. Commenting on the future role of the United States in the Middle East, a research associate of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London had noted that the main thrust of United States policy in the Middle East was to marginalize opponents to the peace process in order to promote a dialogue between Arabs and Israelis and to keep to a minimum the action of countries hostile to that process. Some countries of the region that received conventional weapons from the United States did not necessarily have a high combat readiness as too many weapons rusted in the desert sands.

31. Speaking on the related topic of developments in Arab-Israeli relations, the Consul-General of Israel in New York had said that such relations had been conducted in two phases, bilaterally and through third parties. Having failed to rally the Arabs to the Western camp, the United States had improved its ties with Israel while the traditional alliance of Arabs against Jews had been destroyed following the rapprochement between Egypt and Israel. Unlike the Arab countries, Israel devoted the bulk of United States economic and military assistance to the purchase of United States products. The peace process had drawn the two countries closer together and the United States would continue to play a key role in the quest for peace.

32. In the course of the following discussions, some participants had expressed regret that as a result of its massive assistance to Israel, the United States had reduced its assistance to other developing countries. It had also been suggested that the United States was currently seeking peace in the region because it felt that Israel no longer had real strategic value.

33. A speaker from the Australian National University, commenting on peace and cooperation and security in the Middle East, had said that the process of peace with Israel represented the start of normalization for many Arab countries. There was a lack of cohesion among intellectuals, leaders and the people in Arab societies in terms of how to deal with Israel. Personal contacts among

(The Chairman)

political leaders were essential in that context to promote security, which should be further buttressed by a multilateral framework.

34. A speaker from the Jewish Chronicle had referred to the tendency in the Middle East to conclude agreements that were not subsequently implemented. The United Nations must become more engaged in regional security on an ongoing basis and efforts must be made to establish a new political culture to put an end to the traditional mutual hatred of Arabs and Israelis.

35. In conclusion, the Conference had noted the improvement in the living conditions of Palestinians, the risks borne by regional political leaders in the peace process, the transitional nature of the current period, and the need to discard prejudices and work together towards peace.

36. Mr. FARHADI (Afghanistan) thanked the Chairman for his report. The frank and open discussion which had evidently taken place at the Conference could not have been held before the recent improvements in the political climate.

UNITED NATIONS SEMINAR ON PALESTINIAN TRADE AND INVESTMENT NEEDS, UNESCO HEADQUARTERS, PARIS, 20 TO 22 JUNE 1994

37. The CHAIRMAN said that a United Nations seminar on Palestinian trade and investment needs was to be held at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, from 20 to 22 June 1994, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/213. The seminar would provide an opportunity to contribute to Palestinian development and institution-building during the transitional period as an essential component of a just and lasting peace. Donor countries, United Nations agencies, experts in economic development and non-governmental organizations were expected to participate.

38. The provisional programme for the seminar had been circulated in working paper No. 3. He would take it that the Committee wished to approve the working paper.

39. It was so decided.

40. The CHAIRMAN said that the composition of the Committee delegation to the seminar would be finalized in due course, but would include the Chairman, the Rapporteur, and the Permanent Observer for Palestine.

NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, TORONTO, CANADA, 6 TO 8 JULY 1994

41. The CHAIRMAN noted that the Government of Canada had agreed to host the North American Symposium on the Question of Palestine in Toronto from 6 to 8 July 1994. He expressed the Committee's appreciation. The programme for the Symposium had already been approved by the Committee and preparations were proceeding.

DRAFT REVISED CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION OF NGOs

42. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the draft revised criteria for accreditation of NGOs. The draft revised criteria had been devised by the Bureau in the light of recent developments in the peace process and a desire to expand NGO participation in the work of the Committee. The criteria would continue to be accompanied by an information questionnaire, which would be reviewed to tie in with the electronic information system.

43. He would take it that the Committee wished to approve the draft revised criteria for the accreditation of NGOs.

44. It was so decided.

APPLICATIONS OF NEW NGOs

45. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to working paper No. 4, containing applications by NGOs wishing to participate in the work of the Committee. The organizations in question had been recommended by their respective regional coordinating committees.

46. He would take it that the Committee wished to approve the applications.

47. It was so decided.

48. The CHAIRMAN said that all future applications would be handled under the new criteria.

OTHER MATTERS

49. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the Government of Brazil had agreed to host a seminar and NGO symposium on the question of Palestine for the Latin American and Caribbean region in July or August 1994. Details would be provided in due course.

50. Mr. CHINOY (India) welcomed the positive note struck by the Chairman, and trusted that it presaged a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine. In that connection he welcomed the conclusion of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. The main task was the social and economic development of the Palestinian people, in which connection India would continue to provide support for the movement towards self-rule and self-government.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.